

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BRASIL 03680 082038Z
ACTION ARA-14

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INFO AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO
AMCONSUL SAO PAULO

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRASILIA 3680

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT GEISEL'S HEALTH

REF: BRASILIA 3221

1. PRESIDENT GEISEL'S "GASTRIC PETURBATION" ON APRIL 20 (REFTEL) STIMULATED A MODERATE AMOUNT OF CONCERN IN THE PRESS AND ELSEWHERE ABOUT THE OVERALL STATE OF HIS HEALTH. AFTER DISCREETLY QUERYING A NUMBER OF SOURCES, WE HAVE COME TO THE FOLLOWING TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS:
(A) QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PRESIDENT'S HEALTH BEGAN SURFACING FOLLOWING HIS DISMISSAL OF ARMY MINISTER FROTA LAST OCTOBER 12;
(B) OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING HIS HEALTH DATE FROM ABOUT DECEMBER, WHEN OBSERVERS BEGAN COMMENTING THAT HE "SEEMS VERY TIRED";
(C) THE FIRST PUBLIC EVIDENCE SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN ON MARCH 15 DURING COMMEMORATIONS OF THE FOURTH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS INAUGURATION, WHEN THE PRESIDENT STUMBLED BOTH ON HIS WORDS AND PHYSICALLY AND HAD TO WALK A FEW PACES SUPPORTED BY COMPANIONS; HE REPORTEDLY WAS UNABLE TO FINISH CONDUCTING A SUBSEQUENT MEETING AFTER LOSING TRACK OF SUBJECTS UNDER DISCUSSION.

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(D) THE ONLY OTHER, BUT MOST SERIOUS, PUBLIC EVIDENCE OCCURRED ON APRIL 20;
(E) HE HAS BEEN CUTTING CORNERS SINCE THEN.

2. IN CONSIDERING THE PRESIDENT'S HEALTH, IT MUST BE BORNE IN MIND THAT UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES HE CARRIES AN

UNUSUALLY HEAVY SCHEDULE, AND ESPECIALLY SO FOR A MAN OF 70. THE MONTHS SINCE OCTOBER HAVE BEEN ANYTHING BUT NORMAL, AND GEISEL HAS BEEN UNDER CONSIDERABLE, AND CONSTANT, PHYSICAL AND MENTAL STRAIN;

(A) POLITICAL REASONS CAUSED THE DISMISSAL OF HIS ARMY MINISTER IN OCTOBER AND THE RESIGNATION OF THE CHIEF OF HIS MILITARY HOUSEHOLD IN JANUARY;

(B) HE HAD MADE STATE VISITS TO MEXICO AND URUGUAY IN JANUARY AND TO WEST GERMANY IN MARCH, WHEN HE ALSO RECEIVED PRESIDENT CARTER;

(C) HE HAS BEEN MAKING INCREASINGLY CRITICAL POLITICAL DECISIONS, CULMINATING SO FAR IN THE SELECTION OF 20 OF THE NATION'S NEXT STATE GOVERNORS (SEPT);

(D) HE HAS BEEN KEEPING TO HIS LONG-STANDING PRACTICE OF TRAVELLING INTERNALLY FROM BRASILIA ONCE, TWICE OR SOMETIMES EVEN THREE TIMES A WEEK.

3. "CUTTING CORNERS" HAS MEANT, SO FAR, AN OCCASIONAL 20-30 MINUTE REST, LEAVING AN EVENT EARLY OR ARRIVING LATE, OR NOT TAKING A FULL BRIEFCASE OF WORK HOME. ACCORDING TO AN AIDE, HE STILL RISES BEFORE THE SUN, EXERCISES STRENUOUSLY, WORKS DURING BREAKFAST, ETC. AND, AT LEAST TO TELEVIEWERS, HE LOOKS AND ACTS HEALTHY ON OUTDOOR OCCASIONS.

4. IS, THE, ANYTHING SERIOUSLY, OR POTENTIALLY SERIOUSLY, WRONG WITH THE PRESIDENT? NO ONE OUTSIDE OF HIS VERY CLOSE CIRCLE KNOWS. TO SOME, THIS IS ALL THE MORE REASON FOR CONFIDENTIAL

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CERN. JORNAL DO BRASIL'S CARLOS CASTELLO BRANCO, FOR INSTANCE, OBSERVED THAT THE POLITICAL FUTURE OF BRAZIL IS UNCERTAIN ENOUGH WITH GEISEL AT THE HELM. WHAT THE COURSE OF EVENTS MIGHT BE WITHOUT HIM, OR WITH HIS CONTROL IMPAIRED, CAN ONLY BE SPECULATED.

5. THIS MESSAGE IS NOT INTENDED TO ALARM, BUT SIMPLY TO ALERT, THE DEPARTMENT TO A DEVELOPMENT THAT HAS BEEN, SO FAR, OF RELATIVELY LOW-KEY CONCERN. THE MOST RECENT PUBLIC SPECULATION ABOUT THE PRESIDENT'S HEALTH TOOK PLACE AT THE BEGINNING OF MAY, WHEN IT WAS RUMORED THAT HE SPENT SOME TIME UNDER OBSERVATION BY A CARDIOLOGIST AND A NEUROLOGIST. THE PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESMAN CALLED THIS SPECULATION GROUNDLESS AND POINTED TO GEISEL'S BUSY MAY 1 SCHEDULE--WHEN HE VISITED BOTH PORTO ALEGRE AND SAO PAULO FOR LABOR DAY CELEBRATIONS.

6. WE WILL, OF COURSE, REPORT FURTHER INDICATIONS OF PRESIDENTIAL ILL HEALTH AS THEY COME TO OUR ATTENTION.
JOHNSON

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NNN

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